

SEATTLE LABOR CHORUS ORAL HISTORY PROJECT
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ZOE MYERS OF SEATTLE LABOR CHORUS

INTERVIEWEE: ZOE MYERS

INTERVIEWER: CINDY COLE

SUBJECTS: HIGH SCHOOL OF THE PERFORMING ARTS; NEW YORK; HUNTER COLLEGE; RED DIAPER BABY; STUDENT ACTIVIST; STUDENT NONVIOLENT COORDINATING COMMITTEE; JACQUELINE WEXLER; JOSEPH PAPP'S PUBLIC THEATER; STORYTELLING; ARTIST; ACTIVIST; BELLA ABZUG 1977 MAYORAL CAMPAIGN; FEMINISM; PETE SEEGER; PEACE AND JUSTICE; LABOR MOVEMENT; NEW YORK STATE COUNCIL FOR SENIOR CITIZENS; ALZHEIMER'S ASSOCIATION; GIRL SCOUTS OF THE USA; JEWISH GIRL SCOUTS; NORTHWEST FOLKLIFE FESTIVAL; BATTLE IN SEATTLE; WORLD TRADE ORGANIZATION; 1999 SEATTLE WTO PROTESTS; 2000 BOEING ENGINEERS STRIKE; SOCIETY OF PROFESSIONAL ENGINEERING EMPLOYEES IN AEROSPACE; 2000 PACIFIC NORTHWEST NEWSPAPER GUILD STRIKE; LATKES ON THE LINE; WORKPLACE FATALITIES; HAZARDOUS WORKING CONDITIONS; JANET STECHER

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[00:00:00] **CINDY COLE:** This is an interview with Zoe Myers for the Seattle Labor Chorus Oral History Project. It is taking place in Seattle, Washington, on November 1, 2015, and the interviewer is Cindy Cole. Zoe, why don't you just start by telling me a little bit about your family and your growing up? Just go ahead.

[00:00:37] **ZOE MYERS:** Both my parents were born here in the United States. My father's family came from Poland and my mother's from Russia, right probably around the beginning of the First World War. They were escaping the pogroms and various persecutions as Jews. Settled in New York.

Growing up, I don't remember being schooled in politics or Marxism or morals or ethics, but I just think it was a part of our family culture. We weren't religious, and I do not believe that you need a god to tell you how to live your life well and ethically and morally. It just was a part of who they were and what I became, I guess.

I was in high school in the 60s. I went to the High School of the Performing Arts because in my early years, I thought I wanted to be an actress. I was pretty political in high school. I was co-editor of the underground newspaper, which was a big thing in high schools in the 60s. I helped organize some of the antiwar demonstrations. Then went on to Hunter College, where I was also very politically involved. So, again, it just seemed to be a part of who my family was and what I became.

[00:02:25] **CINDY:** Do you want to go into a little more detail about Hunter College and your activities there?

[00:02:31] **ZOE:** Well, I like to joke that I majored in theater and I minored in campus revolt because, again, this was now the early 70s, and most of my classes were theater classes or humanities. By the time I got to my junior year, I didn't have any of the requirements to graduate. [laughing] But just before that, I guess, when I first got there it was 1970, which was the year of the Cambodian invasion, and we shut down the school for three months. It was kind of an accident, because Hunter College at that time was one very tall building, I think 14-story building, on the Upper East Side of Manhattan, so all the different student groups were meeting in different parts of the schools. The antiwar group was here, and the women's antiwar group was there, and the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee was here. Somehow runners were going back and forth and saying, "We want the president of the college to come and speak to us."

This was I think her name was Jacqueline Drexler [Wexler], if I remember correctly. She was a former nun. So she came down to the lobby of the school. The lobby of the school, again, this high-rise building. So on one side, I think it was the south side, was the entrance into the building, and right across the lobby from that entrance was the auditorium, and then on each side there were banks of elevators. There were like 16 elevators.

The word went out that she was coming to talk to us, and all of the student activists just flooded that lobby, and we had effectively shut down the school, because the only way to get to and from classes and offices was—well, you could climb 14 flights of stairs or whatever, but we effectively shut down the elevators, and we held on for three months. It was quite an interesting time. It was the time of teach-ins, and a lot of the professors would have various sessions around political theory and all. Basically, that ended when the quarter ended and then everybody went back to class.

For me, that also was kind of a transition, because I always had this struggle between politics and theater, because my last semester there, I was accepted as a scholar intern at the New York Shakespeare Festival, Joseph Papp's Public Theater. For six months, I didn't go to class. I did whatever they wanted me to do at the theater, and it was actually my first semester of straight As. Then they hired me, and it was at that point where I dropped out of Hunter College. I went back to school a few years later to finish my degree and went on to get a master's degree, but my education, it seemed, during those years was either politics or theater. [Chuckles]

[00:06:14] **CINDY:** I'm wondering if you have been writing some stories, and maybe you could talk a little bit about that, and then maybe read one of your stories, "The Defining Moment."

[00:06:27] **ZOE:** Sure. I've been wanting to do some memoir writing, not a linear "I was born and such-and-such happened to me," because I don't really know that that's very interesting to anybody. But I have

had some, I think, interesting experiences in my life, met some interesting people. So I've been just playing around with what's being called these days "flash memoir." The stories I'm going to read are a little bit longer than flash memoir, but I have found my way to a local storytelling group. It's really the only free open mic storytelling group in Seattle.

It's become a community for me, so once a month we're given a prompt. We don't all get to speak every month, but I've started crafting stories for this group. Mine are often a little different from a lot of the group, who talk a lot about their relationships and angst in their life. They're very good storytellers and they're interesting stories, but mine often talk a little bit about my political history. The prompt for this one was "defining moment." It references a little bit about what I've already told you.

[Reading]

I've always had the dual nature of the artist and the activist. I was a red diaper baby, raised by radicals with the expectation that I would dedicate myself to peace and justice. I spent my formative years on committees, at demonstrations, and active participant in the civil rights and antiwar movements.

But there were also the arts—piano and ballet lessons, trips to museums and Broadway shows. I was accepted to the High School of the Performing Arts in New York City—the "Fame" school—and there, in between math class and acting lessons, I edited the underground newspaper and organized demonstrations against the war.

I went on to Hunter College where I majored in theater and minored in campus revolt. During the spring of 1970, we shut down the college for three months to protest the American invasion of Cambodia. We organized sing-outs and teach-ins and guerrilla theater performances to spread the word and keep the faith.

I dropped out of college to pursue a career in theater. I flitted about the theater scene, going to auditions without much success, and mostly fulfilling that eternal stereotype of unemployed actress waiting on tables. But even in the restaurants, I was a union activist, organizing small restaurants similarly staffed with young, unemployed actors.

By this time, I had pretty much succumbed to the theatrical uncertainty principle. It was uncertain that I would ever be able to make a living as an actress. I was adrift. Would I wait tables all my life?

Then one day, in the spring of 1977, Bella Abzug declared herself a candidate for mayor. Bella was one of my heroes. She was the first Jewish woman elected to Congress. An attorney, she had started her career defending civil rights cases in the 1950s, and was an early opponent of the Vietnam War. Known for her large stature and ever-present hats, she was a fierce and outspoken advocate for the disenfranchised. So, of course, being a woman, she was labeled brash and belligerent. Some things haven't changed in 40 years.

I went down to campaign headquarters and was immediately assigned to advance. My job was to scope out the location of the candidate's appearances, whether a church in East Harlem or a community center in Queens, or the debate at town hall. Then I passed the information on to the traveling aide when the candidate arrived. Soon, I was promoted to traveling aide, and I accompanied Bella to rallies on Fire Island, in Brighton Beach, and on a weekend jaunt through four hotels in the Catskill Mountains.

Once we did a drop-in at a concert in Central Park. There were 300,000 people picknicking on the Great Lawn. And as Bella made her way forward toward the crowd, they rose in one massive, cheering wave of humanity before her.

It was a heady time for me, surrounded by the leaders of New York City's liberal political wing, and I got to literally sit at the feet of the founders of feminist movement, like Bella and Robin Morgan and Gloria Steinem. I

carried Pete Seeger's backpack as he strode through Greenwich Village, marching and singing on his way to one of Bella's rallies.

However, every campaign exists in historical context, and for New York City, 1977 was the summer from hell. In July, we suffered one of the worst heat waves in history, the temperature reaching 104 degrees several days in a row. A transformer was struck by lightning and the city was plunged into darkness. Several frightening days of looting and arson ensued. The serial killer, Son of Sam, who had been murdering young lovers in Brooklyn and Queens for two years, was finally arrested on August 10. Just the week before, the FALN, a Puerto Rican nationalist organization, set off two bombs in the city killing one man and wounding several bystanders. And then, on August 16, Elvis Presley died at Graceland. One tragedy after another. You try getting your message out with a newscycle like that.

But in the 1970s, we had our own little dramas. My boss was a man named Peter [Arabello?], who was the general manager of the Playboy Club. A strange hire, you might say, for a feminist icon. But back in her lawyering days, Bella had helped Peter out of a jam, and Peter, nothing if not loyal, was repaying the debt. The truth is, he was good at his job, if sometimes a big obtuse, like the time Gloria Steinem was hosting a 60th birthday party for Bella and Peter offered up the Playboy Club—free of charge, of course.

Our campaign manager was a much-decorated and wounded Vietnam vet. He received the Purple Heart for throwing himself in the way of an exploding grenade, thus saving the lives of two of his men. The resulting injuries left him missing his left arm and with a patch where his left eye used to be. This, along with a shock of wavy hair falling over his forehead, and his single twinkling Irish eye, gave him both an air of mystery and the rakish magnetism that charged everyone.

But I don't remember him doing much managing. My strongest memory is of him leaning back in his chair with Shirley MacLaine and Louise Lasser, two of Bella Abzug's Hollywood advisors, draped over his desk vying for his attention. Shirley and Louise, by the way, hated each other, and the evident tension between them proved to be a pall on campaign events and fundraisers.

But the truth is that I was mostly surrounded with sincere, passionate people focused on making the world a better place. They'd spend all day figuring out how to beat the machine and knock the crap out of the political power structure. These were people for whom activism was their daily job. It was a concept that changed my life.

Of course, we lost that election and the next two runs for Congress. We might be able to get 300,000 concertgoers on their feet, but we could never get more than 30 percent of New Yorkers to vote for her. Bella went on to found the modern feminist movement, and worked for two U.S. Presidents. She had an illustrious career, and in many ways so did I, though much smaller and more quiet.

As soon as the mayoral campaign ended, I returned to school to finish my bachelor's degree. I was still waiting tables, and my union hired me as social service director for thousands of workers in the New York City hotels.

[TRANSCRIBER QUESTION: Was this Hotel, Restaurant, Club Employees & Bartenders Union Local 6?] Eventually, I got my master's in public administration, and I've had a 30-year career in the non-profit sector. I have always chosen to work for organizations dedicated to social justice with missions I could fully embrace, just doing my part to repair the world.

What about the arts? For 16 years, I've sung with the Seattle Labor Chorus. You've probably seen us about town at rallies and picket lines. We sing in support of people's struggles for peace and justice. It gives me

immeasurable joy to raise my voice with my brothers and sisters and create a meaningful noise in four-part harmony. This is who I am and where I belong.

[End Reading]

I can hear my New York accent really coming. [laughter] So actually, I kept this paper because something, when I read this at the storytelling group, there was not an opportunity for this, but I think in this context.

[00:16:17] **CINDY:** Sure.

[00:16:17] **ZOE:** I just want to credit one of the phrases I used here, because they'd spend all day figuring out how to beat the machine and knock the crap out of the political power structure. That phrase, "beat the machine and knock the crap out of the political power structure," was Bella.

[00:16:44] **CINDY:** Thank you. Quite an introduction. Do you want to maybe from this point on talk a little bit about going back to school, or some other jobs that you had?

[00:16:58] **ZOE:** Yeah. I think going back to school—gosh, if I had had children, it's a lesson, I guess, that would have served me well is that you can be a really good student when you really want to do it. Because in high school, half our classes were theater and half were academic. We had good teachers, but not very demanding. We had one biology class, we didn't have advanced biology or chemistry or physics or anything.

And at Hunter College also, I didn't avail myself of that college education. I still think that when I retire—I understand that you can audit college classes for free, and I'm thinking I might want to go back and get my bachelor's. Even though I have a bachelor's degree, I want to do the math and the science and the biology that I never got to do.

So, I did. I went back to Hunter for a couple of classes just to see what that would be like. By that time, even just a few years' gap—I was there in my skirt and my heels and fairly formally dressed and everybody else was in ratty jeans and sweatshirts. But I did okay in the classes. I took an American history class and a literature class.

Then I looked around for a continuing ed program and I was accepted to a cohort at New York University. It was for working people, older adults. I did my undergraduate work in the social sciences. The third year we wrote a thesis. I don't remember the exact name of my thesis, but what I did was I looked at the development of the labor movement, tracking it from the 1930s, when there were a lot of laws put in place to protect workers and to encourage union organizing, and how, over the years, unions have become more corporate and more industrial themselves, and where I thought that might have not always been such a good idea. That was my bachelor's degree, and I got my master's much later, actually, just before I moved to Seattle, because I knew I'd be competing with kids half my age and I felt the need to credential myself.

Once I left waitressing, every job I've had since then has been some reflection of my values. The first one was when I was hired by my union. I worked for them for five years. I had done some organizing first as a volunteer, and actually was just about to go in to salt the Marriott organizing campaign—Marriott was the first non-union hotel when it moved to New York City. So I had gone through the process of going for the interview and getting myself hired as a bone fide union waitress when, at that point, I left the union. They never were able to organize the Marriott in New York City.

From there I went on to an organization called New York State Council for Senior Citizens, which was kind of the precursor to the group that we have now that's a part of the AFL. So, I organized union retirees all over New York State.

After that, kind of an interesting break. I became a management consultant for the Alzheimer's Association. We all worked out of our homes and came into Chicago every few months for staff meetings and board meetings. I had the entire Northeast. I was working with councils, helping them develop their organizational structure, their fundraising and their board skills and all that. That was kind of very early 90s when everybody was downsizing, so I got downsized out of that job.

Then went to work for the Girl Scout of the USA. It was a similar job. I had an office. We had a beautiful building in downtown Manhattan, but I traveled all over the country working with Girl Scout councils—similar work, helping to strengthen them organizationally.

[00:21:57] **CINDY:** I know you have also written a story about your Girl Scout work called “Fish Out of Water.”

[00:22:09] **ZOE:** Working for the Girl Scouts was very interesting for me because I had been a Brownie for two weeks, and it wasn't a really good fit for me. Plus, it was the 1950s and being Jewish was somewhat of an anomaly, even though I grew up in a Jewish community, the troop that I was assigned to really wasn't, so I didn't hang around.

But I was really very impressed with the Girl Scouts of the 1990s because it was very much focused on diversity. A council was often the liberal center, progressive center—liberal might be going too far—of some of the communities I was in, like Springfield, Missouri, or, as in the story, Baton Rouge, Louisiana. It was really a delight to be able to support that mission, to bring Girl Scouting to lower-income communities, to often provide leadership training for the mothers, who, building trust in the community, offering value to the community, and then saying, “Well, hey, why don't we do something for your girls?” I had the experience of seeing Girl Scouting as really a transformative experience for a lot of the girls and women that we served. But, as I say, there were sometimes tension.

The prompt for the storytelling group was “fish out of water.” To some extent, the story is about me, but I think it's also about that time in Girl Scouting.

[Reading]

In the early 1990s, I went to work as a management consultant for Girl Scouts of the USA. I had been a Brownie for about two weeks in 1950s Queens. Talk about a fish out of water. This wild little Jewish girl didn't fit in the prim and proper Protestant troop to which I was assigned. Nor did my mother, who was working full-time and not available for the expected volunteer duties.

Thankfully, the Girl Scouts I joined as an adult was a very different organization. In the 1990s, GSUSA had, as a major part of its mission, achieving diversity across class, race, religion and economic status. And it wasn't just talk. The Girl Scouts really began to make changes to its culture. They deemphasized uniforms to ensure access for low-income girls. They also changed their volunteer systems so that working mothers could more easily participate.

The national staff, especially those of us that worked directly with councils, were engaged with rigorous and sometimes uncomfortable anti-racist training. This was where I finally understood that my 1960s “I-don't-see-color-we're-all-equal” racial philosophy was long out of date. How can we not see color when the

United States was built by enslaved Africans and indentured Chinese? How can we all be equal when race and class and other accidents of birth determine the privileges available to us?

But one of the areas in which I continually experienced dissonance in the organization was around religion, or more specifically, around God. In grade school, when we were called to attention for the Pledge of Allegiance, I would stand, hand over heart, and recite: "I pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States of America, and to the republic for which it stands, one nation, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all." Sometimes I would even leave out "with liberty and justice for all" because we all know that's not true.

At the Girl Scouts, most meetings started with the Pledge of Allegiance and then moved on to the Girl Scout Promise. "On my honor, I will try to serve God and my country, to help people at all times, and to live by the Girl Scout law." So here, too, I would promise to try and serve mm-mm and my country. So far so good. I was usually in a crowd of people. No one's attention on me, and I got by.

But then I ran into the problem of grace. I traveled about 50 percent of the time working with Girl Scout councils throughout the country. Often they would welcome me with a public meal with board members and staff. Sometimes, with their girls and their troop leaders if we were at camp. The meals would begin with grace.

Now, grace is not a part of my culture. Jews don't say grace. We have lots of blessings, for the wine, for the challah, for the matzah. Not your typical Girl Scout foods. Mostly it wasn't a problem. I would sit in respectful silence until the amens, and then dig into the food along with everyone else. But then came the day when a board president turned to me and said, "Zoe, why don't you lead us in grace?" She thought she was doing me an honor.

I stammered through the explanation that I was Jewish and we didn't say grace. I can still see the look of astonishment around the table because most of these people had never met a Jewish person before, let alone someone who would not begin a meal with praise for God.

I was not the only one experiencing this discomfort. In November 1992, a lawsuit was filed on behalf of a 12-year-old atheist girl in Anaheim whose troop had canceled meetings to prevent her participation. The year before, her attorney had filed a case against the Boy Scouts on behalf of his twin nine-year-old boys who had been kicked out of Cub Scouts for similar reasons. Unlike the Boy Scouts who, almost 25 years later, are still fighting this issue, the Girl Scouts settled the case in 1993.

That year, at our national convention in Minneapolis, almost 2,000 delegates, including me, voted four to one to change the Girl Scout Promise to be more inclusive of religious diversity. We didn't change the words, but the policy changed allowing for members to heed their conscience and religious beliefs when saying the Promise. Most continued to try to serve God, but Muslims served Allah, atheists served humanity. And, yes, there were those who served Wicca, or were just silent.

It was a risky move. The country was still feeling the effects of Jerry Falwell's Moral Majority and the rise of the Christian right, so it wasn't all smooth sailing. Soon, I got a call from the executive director of the Girl Scout Council in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. Several board members, led by the treasurer, had publicly renounced the new policy and threatened to resign. They were going to start their own Girl Scout Council. She asked me to come down and help her and the board president ride this wave.

I was met in Baton Rouge by Becky, a national volunteer. It was a big deal to have a national volunteer sent to your council. Becky, a middle-aged African-American businesswoman with a Southerner's impeccable manners, was there to speak their language in a way that this Jewish atheist Yankee could not.

Becky and I went to the board meeting, which had been called specifically to address the issue of the Promise. Barely a moment after the introduction, the treasurer launched into a fevered rant against the new policy. “After all, America was a Christian, God-fearing nation and Girl Scouting was founded on these principles.” He restated the threat that if the council went ahead, he and his followers would resign and start their own council.

Becky responded that we were extremely grateful for the service the board members have given, and that we completely respected their religious beliefs. And, of course, that was what this new policy was about, respecting the beliefs of those who loved Girl Scouting. And, in her best *Steel Magnolia* persona, she told them basically that it was our way or the highway.

You see, Girl Scout councils aren’t independent organizations. They’re part of a federation, and achieve their non-profit status through the national’s 501[c]3. They have to abide by the rules, and no one can start a Girl Scout council without permission.

Becky and I left and they reconvened in executive session. The treasurer did resign, but the rest of the board members stayed on, and Becky and I helped the council reconcile. And, as often happens when an organization survives a story which threatens its values, they emerge stronger and closer than before.

This was an incredible learning opportunity for me, and gave me a chance to reflect on my own prejudices. Just as that white Southern Christian man in Baton Rouge feared those who believed differently than he did, so did I. The difference is that he had no place in his world for me. But as far as I’m concerned, if you’re not hurting anyone or forcing your beliefs on others, you’ve got a place in my world.

[00:32:11] **CINDY:** After the Girls Scouts, how did you come to work at your present job? And are there any other instances of your work that you’d like to share?

[00:32:19] **ZOE:** Well, by the time I got to the Girl Scouts, I actually was ready to leave New York. It wasn’t really a very fun time there. It was recession. New York had a challenging recession in the 80s and early 90s and was cranky. It just wasn’t where I wanted to be anymore.

I had been traveling for business a lot—the Girl Scouts, the Alzheimer’s Association—and I began looking for other places to live. That’s how I discovered Seattle. I came to Seattle straight from the Girl Scouts. I didn’t have a job when I moved here.

My first job here was as development director. The last year at Girl Scouts, I had been a fundraising consultant, specializing in fundraising. So I moved here and became development director for an organization that did work around childcare, both from a policy perspective to increase affordable, quality childcare, but also supporting parents as well as childcare providers. It was a really well-run organization that’s grown significantly while I was there and since I left.

From there, I guess, I spent most of my career in Seattle as development director for a domestic violence agency in town, which also was a learning opportunity. Fortunately, I hadn’t personally had experience with domestic violence or known anybody—I’m sure I knew somebody, I just didn’t know that they were victims of domestic violence. So, again, had a lot to learn about that issue, and felt privileged to work for that organization.

As always happens, it came time to leave there. Where I am now is with a very small, very young civil legal aid organization. It was founded out of the financial crisis of—what is it?—almost 10 years ago—particularly around foreclosure, the terrible growth in people losing their homes. We focus on foreclosure prevention as well as non-homeowner bankruptcies and unfair debt collection and credit reporting issues.

So, very different from any other organization I've done. It's really been start-up, not only with fundraising but with a lot of the organizational structure. My organizational development background, my management consultant background, has really been useful there. But very smart, funny people, and I know we do good work, because the truth is, we know this—right?—that before the financial crisis and the collapse of the housing market, people were a paycheck away from losing their home or a major illness away from losing their home, you know, everyday working people. It just feels like once the white middle-class was affected and suddenly, people paid attention.

So, that's where I am now.

[00:35:59] **CINDY:** You spoke a little bit before about the Seattle Labor Chorus, but I know that you've written another story about that. Why don't we share that now, how you got involved with Seattle Labor Chorus?

[00:36:16] **ZOE:** This was an interesting story to write. I probably shouldn't damn it before I read it, but I was wanting to describe what it's like to do choral singing without doing it. I can't demonstrate that, and I can only sing one part at a time. The prompt for this was "anything for love." I know that the leader of the group probably expected everybody to do songs about romance, but it turned out that very few of us did because I think that there are loves that we have in our life that can sometimes be even more transformative than the love that we might have with a romantic love that we have. Here we go.

[Reading]

I've always loved to sing. You know, it's considered the first art, singing. Before there were instruments, there was song. We sing in reverence, we sing our babies to sleep, we comfort ourselves with song, we raise our voices in anger and joy and protest. Growing up, I sang a lot. It was a time when folk songs were at the top of the charts. We went to folk concerts—Peter, Paul and Mary, the Weavers, Pete Seeger—not so much to listen but to sing along.

I joined the glee club in junior high school with great expectations, but unfortunately, I have a pretty bad voice, and I was put in the back row and told to lip sync. That cured me of singing in public.

In late 1996, I moved to Seattle. I had done a great deal of research on the city, and through an active networking, I had arrived without a job, but with a solid personal and professional network. I had also discovered Folklife, and knew that this annual folk music festival would be an important part of my life, but I had no idea how important.

Pete Seeger was the headliner of my first Folklife in May of 1997, a hero of mine since childhood. I had been to many Pete Seeger concerts and had the opportunity to meet and work with him through various political activity. He didn't know me, but he was the most gracious, generous soul. He always made you think you were his best friend. Pete had been repeatedly invited to headline at Folklife and had declined each time. He was in his late 70s and his voice was failing. But in 1997, he agreed to sing if the Seattle labor movement would organize a chorus to back him up.

Well, when you ask a community of professional organizers to put something together, you're going to get one hell of a show. Indeed, a few leaders put out a call for singers, and soon over 100 showed up. Over several months they rehearsed until the big day when they finally got to sing with Pete.

Now, I know all this secondhand. I was introduced to the Seattle Labor Chorus, along with everyone else, from the audience sitting on the grass under the Space Needle and a beautiful blue sky eating strawberry shortcake with some new best friends. It was an amazing event. There is actually a video on the Folklife Web site about

that first performance. It was supposed to be a one-shot deal, but everyone had such a great time that here we are, preparing to sing at our 19th Folklife.

I didn't join until 1999. It was a non-audition chorus, and I wasn't put in the back row and forced to lip sync, but it was hard for me. Over the years, I'd lost much of my sight-reading skills, and often had trouble staying on tune. But gradually, I became more confident.

I sang at my first Folklife that May, but my true musical baptism came on November 30 at the "Battle in Seattle." The World Trade Organization had come to town. The Seattle Labor Chorus started off the rally in Memorial Stadium as the opening act for Sweet Honey and the Rock. Then we joined with 50,000 peaceful marchers and headed downtown to the Convention Center, and we shut down the WTO.

The next year, I especially remember two events. In February 2000 we supported SPEEA [Society of Professional Engineering Employees in Aerospace], the engineering workers, when they struck Boeing. We sang at rallies and picket lines as they gathered around burn barrels—big metal oil drums fitted out as pretty effective streetside furnaces. They're engineers. That's what they do.

Later that year, we were supporting the writers' [Newspaper] Guild strike against the Seattle Times. It was December and it was cold. But what did writers know about burn barrels? So the call went out, and one night some SPEEA members arrived hauling several barrels on the back of their truck. It was Hanukkah, and along with singing our support, we fried up some potato pancakes for the strikers. We called this event "Latkes on the Line."

Over the years, we have sung in solidarity with labor, for peace and against war, and in support of economic and environmental justice. We sing in honor of American workers killed or injured on the job. In 2013, an average 150 workers a day died from hazardous working conditions. These are the people who drill our oil and mine our coal, who sew our clothes and harvest our food.

The Seattle Labor Chorus has become the center of my life. Many of my closest friends are in the chorus, and we are a strong community. Sometimes it feels as if we are a congregation gathering every Tuesday night for services, and that service comes through singing in four-part harmony.

Over the years, we've had at least three weddings, two chorus members marrying each other. We've nursed each other through cancer, broken bones and surgeries. The past two years we've had too many deaths. Last year, we had our first baby with another one coming the end of this year. Fancy trick considering that our median age is about 62.

We're not professional singers. Sometimes when we start learning a new song it sounds more like a clowder of cats screeching in the alley. But bit by bit, as we become more confident in the music and lyrics, it all comes together.

Sometimes when we make music together, there are moments so exquisite. We are the embodiment of the dichotomy of quantum mechanics. We are at the same time one and many, wave and particle, note and chord.

I'm an alto. We often sing the melody or parallel the melody, which is a good thing for me because that's often the easiest part. The melody anchors the song. Our basses obviously sing the low parts, the foundation of the song, the [patho continuo?], the backbeat. You just can't lose it.

Music is really nothing except air and vibration. And sometimes when our basses sing, I can feel that music vibrating up through the floor and into my body. They just rock my soul. The sopranos lift us up with their

[death cant?] , sung in counterpoint to the melody. And the tenors—I think tenors have the most difficult part. Often there's no sustained, melodic line. But each note they sing completes each chord.

And there I am with my weak, breathy voice, supported by the basses, lifted up by the sopranos, linked to the tenors and surrounded by the altos, and my voice is strong and steady. I've always loved to sing.

So, I made some footnotes to that one also. [laughter] When I wrote it—and I talk about the babies—I forgot about Riley. I think Riley was the first—Karen [unintelligible] , wasn't she pregnant like the first year?

[00:44:38] **CINDY:** Yeah, she was.

[00:44:39] **ZOE:** So, historically a little bit incorrect, we had our first baby 19 years ago and he's a fabulous musician now. And our third baby was just born this week.

I also need to credit a phrase to somebody else. I'm feeling very historically correct right now. I was actually in a storytelling workshop with Janet Stecher, our Director, and we were both working on stories about the chorus, and she specifically was working also on, how do you describe the music part? The wave and particle phrase comes from her. I just was trying to expand on that in terms of the one and many, wave and particle, note and chord. Need to give credit where credit's due.

[00:45:37] **CINDY:** Right, thanks. Is there anything else that you'd like to talk about before we finish?

[00:45:49] **ZOE:** I guess the only thing is I'm really very optimistic about the future. I think one of the reasons we people get frustrated or pessimistic is not so much because there's more hate and more war. I think we just know more about it because of social media, and it's harder to bear when it's that immediate. You and I remember watching the Vietnam War on television with our dinner. But I think that the 20-somethings and the 30-somethings that are getting politically active now, they may not be doing it exactly as we did it, and some of their focus is a little different. But I'm just really encouraged. They're beginning to get elected to office and they're beginning to lead organizations. We've met some of them and they're amazing organizers. So I'm just really very optimistic. I do not believe that we'll see peace in our time, but it's our job to at least working towards it.

[00:47:15] **CINDY:** Thank you, Zoe.